

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A tunnel designatorsystem to couple tunnel servers to tunnel clients executing host applications for use in a virtual private network (VPN) environment, said tunnel designator not being one of said tunnel servers and comprising:
 - (a) a receiver that receives requests from host applications executing on the tunnel clients, the requests addressed to at least one of the tunnel servers~~the tunnel coupling system~~ to establish a VPN tunnel;
 - (b) a processor that processes the requests, the processor also maintaining ~~and~~ an indication of loads on the tunnel servers, the processor operative to establish the VPN tunnels by designating at least one of the tunnel servers to ~~each of the requests~~each tunnel; and
 - (c) a tunnel traffic distributor that distributes tunnel traffic to the tunnel servers based at least part on the designations.
2. (currently amended) The systemtunnel designator of claim 1, ~~and further comprising:~~
 - (a) an evaluation processor that evaluates the tunnel traffic before the tunnel traffic distributor distributes the tunnel traffic to the tunnel servers.
3. (currently amended) The systemtunnel designator of claim 2, wherein the evaluation performed by the evaluation processor includes at least performing security functions on the tunnel traffic.
4. (currently amended) The tunnel designatorsystem of claim 1, wherein:
 - (a) the ~~request~~ processor establishes the VPN tunnel by, in part, associating each VPN tunnel with characteristics of tunnel traffic for that VPN tunnel; and

(b) the tunnel traffic distributor operates in part based on the associations, without involvement of the host applications.

5. (new) A method of connecting a plurality of tunnel clients to a plurality of tunnel servers using a tunnel designator, the method comprising:

using said tunnel designator to receive a request from one of said tunnel clients;

determining if said request is a valid request from one of said tunnel clients;

determining if said request is for a new tunnel, and

if so:

(a) opening a new tunnel to a selected one of said tunnel servers; and

(b) modifying an address map to include information associating said selected one of said tunnel servers to said request;

if not:

(b) using said address map to route said request to a mapped tunnel server.